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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003887

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PNAT](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: SUNNI ARAB LEADER ON REFERENDUM PROSPECTS

REF: A. A) BAGHDAD 3718

¶B. B) BAGHDAD 3758

Classified By: Political Counselor Robert Ford
for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. Sunni Arab Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) leader Ayad Samarai said September 18 that while constitution language on Arab identity is now sufficient, further language changes will need to be made on federalism and other national issues before Sunni Arab leaders could consider asking their backers to vote for the constitution in the October 15 referendum. Samarai said that they are not in contact with the Shia Coalition to discuss changes to the text. Instead, efforts to form an anti-constitution alliance with Shia cleric Moqtada al-Sadr have been rebuffed but continue - though most Sadr backers will probably vote in favor of the constitution. He said that violence in Sunni Arab areas could be reduced by incorporating locals into Army and Police units and investigating alleged human rights violations. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) leader Ayad al-Samarai told Poloff at a September 18 meeting that Sunni Arab leaders were very disappointed when the final draft constitution was announced September 14. He complained that changes "agreed" to with Kurdish leader Barzani at Irbil a week earlier were not incorporated into the draft. (Note: Per reftels, accounts of what was agreed to in Irbil differ. End note.) Samarai argued that the USG has a responsibility to do more to ensure that Sunnis are not disenfranchised in the process. While the language on Arab identity is now acceptable to the IIP, federalism and other national interest issues remain. Poloff countered that the USG has gone to great lengths to facilitate Sunni Arab participation in the process yet the Sunni leadership had fallen short on timelines and specifics time and time again. Samarai said he was one of four members of an IIP committee that in a few days will list 3 to 4 changes to the draft Constitution that would have to be made before the IIP could support its passage in the Oct. 15 referendum. He noted, however, that party leaders could not agree on a common position on the constitution. While a joint statement is still possible, it is likely that each party will issue separate statements encouraging people to vote no. (Note: Sunni Arab leaders continue to preach unity but act individually - Constitutional Committee expert Hussein Al-Faluji is calling for a boycott of the vote while National Dialogue leader Saleh Al-Mutlak held a press conference on September 20 to announce a petition drive to secure 5 million signatures opposing the Constitution. However, Shia Coalition negotiator Ali Debbagh told PolCouns on September 20 that Mutlak was also trying to meet him to negotiate two parts of the text again. End Note.)

Mood of the People

¶3. (C) Samarai said that the mood of the Sunni Arabs is to reject the Constitution but to take part in the process. People will accept the result if the constitution is approved by a moderate margin, giving Sunni Arabs hope for changes to it through the political process. Otherwise, there will be bitterness and violence. Sunni Arabs also fear that the Shia and Kurds will try to prevent them from participating in the referendum, even if that means supporting terrorism.

4 (C) Smara turned to the issue of violence in Iraq, which increases at critical points. He said that having outsiders, who are not trusted and often mistreat the locals, police Sunni Arab areas increases violence. There is little confidence in the current recruit vetting process that, because of the dishonesty of local officials, ultimately rejects all Sunni Arab applicants. It is important that local people be recruited to serve in the Army and Police units in Sunni Arab areas, even if that means forgiving some past insurgent activity, especially for

the officer corps. Poloff told Sammarai that the best way to reduce violence is for Sunni leaders to work with their communities to stem support for the insurgency.

15. (C) Sammarai said that Sunni Arab leaders are also unhappy that while they are constantly pressured to make statements condemning terrorist murders of Shias, no statements have been made by Shia condemning the mistreatment and murder of Sunni Arabs. Further, he alleged that incidents of Sunni abuse, including those committed by people in Army or Police uniforms, go uninvestigated by authorities. Action against these people will help reduce violence, he said.

Coalition for "no" Vote with Sadr?

16. (C) Commenting on reports of a possible coalition with Shia cleric Moqtada al-Sadr, rumored to be opposed to the constitution, Sammarai confirmed that discussions are being held. Sammarai said that Sadr recently rebuffed a visit by ten Sunnis (scholars, tribal leaders and 2 party officials) saying he needs to think about it. Sammarai believes that Sadr only wants with top Sunni Arab officials and negotiations are continuing on setting up a meeting. Sadrist are extreme, not very well organized, and cannot be trusted because of the danger of Iranian infiltration. Dealing with Sadr would not be popular with the Sunni Arab street - thus top Sunni political leaders are hesitant and a public rebuff would be humiliating.

17. (C) It is likely, according to Sammarai, that Sadr will not support the constitution but will leave the decision on how to vote to his supporters. In this way, Sadr will maintain good relations with all sides. Sammarai predicted that most Sadrists will vote for the constitution.

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